

VZCZCXRO7744

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN  
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHBW #0496/01 1401528  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 191528Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0313  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHVJ/AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO 0005  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEPGDA/USEUCOM JIC VAIHINGEN GE  
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BELGRADE 0435

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000496

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MW](#) [KV](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: SERBIA'S SANDZAK: DESPITE PRO-DEMOCRATIC ELECTION RESULTS,  
LOCAL DIVISIONS AND PROBLEMS WILL PERSIST

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SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Democratic forces in the Bosniak majority city of Novi Pazar won more votes than the party of strong arm Mayor Sulejman Ugljanin in May 11th's local election. Despite his second place finish, Ugljanin may still be able to maintain power with the help of a local Serb coalition and his party may have a deciding role on the national level. Though the elections have given democratic forces a growing base of support, the Bosniak community in the Sandzak region will continue to face ongoing political division and security concerns. End Summary.

BOSNIAKS FAVOR DEMOCRATIC PARTY PARTNER

2. (SBU) In Novi Pazar's May 11 local elections, the Democratic Party's (DS) coalition, led locally by its Bosniak coalition partner the Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP), won nearly 50% of the votes, outperforming the ruling Sandzak Democratic Alliance (SDA) coalition, led by incumbent strong arm Mayor Sulejman Ugljanin. In the preliminary election results, the DS-SDP "For a European Serbia, led locally by Labor and Social Policy Minister Rasim Ljajic, won 48.9% (23 seats), and the SDA-led "For a European Sandzak" won 38.3% (18 seats). The remaining 17.8% (6 seats) went to the local Serbian List coalition, comprised of the indicted war criminal Vojislav Seselj's Radicals (SRS), Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia-New Serbia coalition (DSS-NS), and the Socialists (SPS) of deceased indicted war criminal and former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. In Novi Pazar, 24 seats will be necessary to form a majority in the 47 seat local assembly.

BUT UGLJANIN STILL HAS OPTIONS

13. (SBU) Despite Ugljanin's defeat to the SDP, he may still be able to pull together a ruling coalition with the local Serb ticket (reftel A). On the national level, both the DS and DSS are courting Ugljanin in order to secure the two seats his coalition won in the concurrent parliamentary elections (reftel B). In either scenario, Ugljanin could continue to exert significant political influence.

14. (SBU) The DSS had already approached Ugljanin to join them in a possible government coalition, Ugljanin's political advisor and current Bosniak MP, Bajram Omeragic, told DCM on May 14. The DSS had offered the SDA ticket the regional development ministerial portfolio, Omeragic said. SDA was willing to negotiate with the DS camp, Omeragic said, but the DS had been slow to provide specifics and the SDA would insist on a ministerial portfolio. Omeragic said the Bosniaks were in a difficult political situation and that ultimately they wanted to avoid being the kingmakers of any coalition.

MUFTI: AS LONG AS UGLJANIN REMAINS, COMMUNITY WILL BE SPLIT

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15. (SBU) As long as Ugljanin remains a political force in the region, he would continue to destabilize the Bosniak community, Mufti Muamer Zukorlic told poloff on May 12. Zukorlic said he was pleased to see Ugljanin's lower popularity compared to Ljajic's SDP in the election but he did not expect Ugljanin would be "humble" in his local electoral defeat. "Right now Ugljanin is coming up with a way to save himself," Zukorlic

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said. He said it was difficult to predict the outcome but said if SDA sided with the DSS and Radicals in the local Serb list, the region would continue to be destabilized. If Ugljanin loses power, Zukorlic expected that the competing Islamic community, led by Zukorlic's rival Imam Edam Zilkic, would collapse in the absence of Ugljanin's political backing. (reftel C)

16. (SBU) Zukorlic was well aware that these events were not isolated, and the coalitions that are forming on the national level would directly affect the situation on the ground in Novi Pazar. Ugljanin's fate will be partly determined by how much support he receives from Belgrade and whether Kostunica remains a player on the national level. "This is not yet played out," Zukorlic said.

TRYING TO KEEP THE PEACE AMONG THE DIVIDED BOSNIAKS

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17. (SBU) Regardless of whomever becomes mayor, the political division within the Bosniak community will continue to be a concern, Novi Pazar Police Chief Dragan Terzic told poloff on May 12. (Terzic, an ethnic Serb, became Chief of Police of this Bosniak region in January 2008. Prior to his appointment he was Assistant to the Director of Police.) Trying to keep the peace between the divided factions of the Bosniak community was a top priority for the local police, Terzic said. The police, comprised of officers loyal to both Bosniak factions, have tried to establish trust from both sides, Terzic said. He cited the absence of violence on election day as a step in the right

direction, but admitted there was much more to be done. Ultimately, he said, resolving the dispute among the Bosniak community was not a police issue and could only be resolved from within the community.

#### REGIONAL SECURITY STILL A CONCERN

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18. (SBU) Novi Pazar will also continue to face security challenges which are specific to the region and magnified by the political situation, Terzic said. One of the largest security challenges was combating smuggling along the border with Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia, Terzic said. He described Novi Pazar as "a region where various winds blow," and said the region was a den for organized crime, drug and weapons trafficking, and trafficking in persons. He specifically cited smuggling from Kosovo as a security concern, calling Kosovo the "European Colombia" and the biggest smuggler of arms. He said smuggling would continue to be a problem in the Sandzak region for the foreseeable future.

#### COMMENT

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19. (SBU) The DS-SDP electoral victory over the SDA ticket was a boost to democratic, pro-western parties. Ugljanin, however, remains a potent force on both the local and national levels; and his political future, and that of Novi Pazar, may be determined by whichever national party can give him a bigger slice of the political pie. Such political trading may only further divide the Bosniak community and aggravate the security concerns which the citizens of Sandzak continue to endure. End Comment.

MUNTER